(d) During the last meeting of the Indo-Russian Joint Working Group on Afghanistan, which was held in Moscow on June 25-26, 2001, in-depth discussions were held on the issues pertaining to the situation in Afghanistan and around it. These included issues of Taliban held areas in Afghanistan having become nerve centres and breeding ground for terrorists and separatist forces, narcotics and extremist ideologies; the need for effective implementation of UN Security Council Resolutions No. 1267 and No. 1333 and end of foreign interference in Afghan Affairs; unacceptability of discriminatory policies of the Taliban in particular the recent Taliban decree, prescribing distinctive dress code and wearing of distinguishing marks for Afghan Hindus and Sikhs, and importance of coordinated international cooperation for reducing the fall out and eventually for the elimination of negative forces of terrorism, narcotics and extremist ideologies emanating from the Talitan held areas in Afghanistan. The two sides agreed to continue close cooperation at the bilateral level as well as multilaterally to address the threats of terrorist forces, narco-terrorism and extremist ideologies emanating from the Taliban held areas in Afghanistan.

Regional Organisation to combat militancy

4176. SHRI RAVI SHANKAR PRASAD : Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government's attention has been drawn to the press report appearing on page 13 of the 'Hindustan Times' dated 16th June, 2001 that leaders of China, Russia and four Central Asian States have launched a new regional organisation to combat ethnic and religious militancy including Islamic militancy and jointly crack down on terrorist, separatist and extremist elements; and

(b) if so, Government's reaction thereto and whether Government propose to collaborate in these efforts or to form their own forum by seeking cooperation from neighbouring countries ?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI OMAR ABDULLAH) : (a) Yes, Sir. The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) was established at the Summit of the Heads of States of China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan on 14-15 June, 2001 in Shanghai, China. In the declaration on the establishment of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation the member States agreed to cooperate in dealing with terrorism, separatism and extremism including the establishment of an anti-terrorist centre in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan. At the Summit, the member States also

signed the Shanghai Convention on Combating Terrorism, Separatism and Extremism.

(b) India shares a common concern with the countries of this region on the need to combat terrorism, separatism and extremism. SCO is evolving and the principles and criteria relating to the admission of new members are being formulated.

Temples and gurdwaras in Pakistan

4177. SHRI NANA DESHMUKH : Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that the question of maintaining of Hindu temples and Sikh Gurdwaras in Pakistan was taken up during the recent Pak Summit; and

(b) if so, what has been the reaction of Pakistani counterpart ?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI OMAR ABDULLAH) : (a) and (b) Yes, Sir. During his discussions with President Pervez Musharraf at the Agra Summit level talks (15th & 16th July, 2001), Prime Minister Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee raised the issue of upkeep of Sikh gurdwaras and Hindu temples in Pakistan, as well as the treatment of Indian pilgrims visiting shrines in Pakistan. He noted that the presence of known terrorists who have been allowed to stay in Sikh gurdwaras in Pakistan was a matter of grave concern to our nationals who practice the Sikh religion.

There has been no evidence of any change in Pakistan's approaches and policies towards India which has included the sponsorship of cross border terrorism and adversarial propaganda.

Press Conference by Musharraf

4178. SHRI GANDHI AZAD : Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Musharraf's Press Conference at the Agra Summit was within the agreed norms of dialogue; and

(b) if so, the details of agreed norms ?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI OMAR ABDULLAH) : (a) and (b) Government are of the view that India-Pakistan Summit level talks are opportunities to move our bilateral relations in